

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-10

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FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

TO USMISSION NATO PRIORITY

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CINCEUR

CINCUSAFE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 4733

LIMDIS/U.S. EYES ONLY

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: MASS NATO NL

SUBJECT: F104 REPLACEMENT: CENTRAL REGION'S FIGHTER

AIRCRAFT REQUIREMENT THROUGH 1980'S

REF: THE HAGUE 4659 (NOTAL)

1. DCM CALLED ON STATE SECRETARY FOR DEFENSE (MATERIEL) STEMERDINK SEPT. 20 AT LATTER'S REQUEST. STEMERDINK QUICKLY GOT TO THE POINT BY STATING THAT REPLACEMENT FOR DUTCH F104S IS "NO PROBLEM" FOR GON AS FAR AS AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS OR CO-PRODUCTION ARRANGEMENTS ARE CONCERNED BUT IT IS A POLITICAL PROBLEM IN TERMS OF DEFINING THE FUTURE MILITARY REQUIREMENT FOR FIGHTER AIRCRAFT ON CENTRAL FRONT.

2. STEMERDINK EXPLAINED THAT HE AND MOD VREDELING
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ARE FACING DIFFICULT TASK IN WITHSTANDING PRESSURE

FROM RADICAL LEFT OF THEIR OWN (LABOR) PARTY FOR THE GON TO OPT FOR A LESS SOPHISTICATED AND EXPENSIVE REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT THAN THE YF-16 OR 17 (SEE THE HAGUE 4676 FOR REPORT OF LABOR PARTY COUNCIL ACTIONS SEPT. 21 OPPOSING SELECTION OF US REPLACEMENT). THESE PEOPLE QUESTION WHETHER THE RNLAf NEEDS SUCH AN EXPENSIVE PLANE AS THE COBRA OR THE YF-16. THEREFORE WHAT THE SITUATION CALLS FOR IS A CLEAR STATEMENT BY TOP NATO AUTHORITIES THAT THE DUTCH REPLACEMENT FIGHTER MUST FULFILL ROLES AND POSSESS CHARACTERISTICS FOUND IN THE AMERICAN CANDIDATES BUT NOT IN A LESS EXPENSIVE, LESS SOPHISTICATED AIRCRAFT. IN OTHER WORDS, IT MUST BE DEMONSTRATED TO THE ADVERSARIES OF THE AMERICAN AIRCRAFT THAT NEITHER ONE IS "TOO MUCH AIRPLANE" FOR THE NETHERLANDS. IF NATO CAN MAKE SUCH A STATEMENT, THERE WILL BE NO (POLITICAL) PROBLEM. OTHERWISE, THERE WOULD BE A PROBLEM AND GON WOULD BE FORCED TO RE-STUDY THE REPLACEMENT QUESTION.

3. COMMENT: SENIOR GON OFFICIALS CONCERNED WITH AIRCRAFT REPLACEMENT ISSUE ARE AWARE THAT NATO HAD ALREADY SPECIFIED AT CONCLUSION OF ITS 1973 AIRCRAFT SPECIALIZATION STUDY THE REQUIREMENTS WHICH GON REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT SHOULD MEET. DCM RECALLED THIS TO STEMERDINK, POINTING OUT THAT THOSE REQUIREMENTS WOULD MEAN AN AIRCRAFT WITH THE LIMITED AIR SUPERIORITY AND OTHER CAPABILITIES OF THE COBRA OR THE YF-16. STEMERDINK DID NOT DEMUR BUT INDICATED THAT WHAT HE NEEDED WAS A CURRENT AUTHORITY STATEMENT RE REQUIREMENTS THAT COULD BE EFFECTIVELY USED IN THE PARLIAMENTARY DOMAIN. IN A SEPT. 24 CONVERSATION, PRIME MINISTER DEN UYL'S FOREIGN POLICY AND DEFENSE ADVISER MERCKELBACK SAID THAT THERE COULD BE A PROBLEM IN PARLIAMENT, ESPECIALLY EMANATING FROM THE LABOR PARTY, AS TO WHETHER THE NETHERLANDS REALLY NEEDED THE KIND OF REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT IT WAS CURRENTLY SHOPPING FOR.

4. ALTHOUGH STEMERDINK'S APPROACH MAY BE SOMEWHAT UNORTHODOX, WE PRESUME THAT HE USED THE EMBASSY CHANNEL
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BECAUSE HE DID NOT WANT LEFT-WING LABOR PARTY MEMBERS TO KNOW HOW HE IS HANDLING THE REPLACEMENT QUESTION. WHETHER HE COORDINATED BEFOREHAND WITH HIS OWN MILITARY IS DOUBTFUL BUT NOT REALLY OUR PROBLEM. IN VIEW OF THE SENSITIVITY, WE ARE NOT RPT NOT INFORMING OUR DUTCH MILITARY CONTACTS OF STEMERDINK'S REQUEST ALTHOUGH THEY MAY LEAVE OF IT THROUGH THEIR OWN CHANNELS. IN TERMS OF US INTEREST IT IS OF GREAT

IMPORTANCE, IN OUR JUDGEMENT, TO HELP STEMERDINK MEET HIS POLITICAL PROBLEM. WE LEAVE TO USNATO'S DISCRETION AND GOOD JUDGEMENT HOW BEST TO ELICIT THE STATEMENT DESIRED BY STEMERDINK. IT WOULD BE BEST TO AVOID MENTIONING HIM BY NAME AS THE SOURCE OF THE REQUEST. ONE POSSIBLE GAMBIT WOULD BE TO LET NATO AUTHORITIES KNOW OF THE QUESTIONS BEING RAISED IN THE DUTCH PARLIAMENT ABOUT THE REPLACEMENT FIGHTER AND REQUEST AN AUTHORITY STATEMENT OF THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE 1973 AIR FORCE SPECIALIZATION SUBCOMMITTEE. NATO AUTHORITIES COULD BE TOLD THAT SUCH A STATEMENT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO THE GON IN CONVINCING PARLIAMENT AND DUTCH PUBLIC OPINION THAT THE NETHERLANDS DOES INDEED NEED A REPLACEMENT FIGHTER WITH THE CAPABILITIES OF THE COBRA OR YF-16.

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